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Andrew Sarris

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ANDREW SARRIS

The Auteur Theory And The Perils Of Pauline

Pauline Kael's article "Circles and Squares," in our last issue, was a blistering attack on the "auteur" school of criticism as it has been seen in the work of Andrew Sarris and such journals as "Movie" and the "New York Film Bulletin." Mr. Sarris has sent us the following article as his reply. Since Miss Kael's views held the floor for a quarter, we will allow Mr. Sarris the same time; in the subsequent issue they may both wish to make some brief closing comments, as will the editor.

"Be sure that you go to the author to get at his meaning, not to find yours."

—JOHN RUSKIN, *Sesame and Lilies*

"I call these sketches Shadowgraphs, partly by the designation to remind you at once that they derive from the darker side of life, partly because like other shadowgraphs they are not directly visible. When I take a shadowgraph in my hand, it makes no impression on me, and gives me no clear conception of it. Only when I hold it up opposite the wall, and now look not directly at it, but at that which appears on the wall, am I able to see it. So also with the picture which I wish to show here, an inward picture which does not become perceptible until I see it through the external. This external is perhaps quite unobtrusive but not until I look through it, do I discover that inner picture which I desire to show you, an inner picture too delicately drawn to be outwardly visible, woven as it is of the tenderest moods of the soul."

—SOREN KIERKEGAARD, *Either/Or*

I. THE AUTEUR THEORY

Certain misconceptions about the auteur theory which have crept into the pages of *Film Quarterly* now seem to be treated as gospel by critics West of the Rockies. In the Spring, 1963, issue, for example, Ernest Callenbach sums up the critical ferment of a decade: "In 1957, in the Paris monthly *Cahiers du Cinéma*, François Truffaut proposed for the

magazine a 'politique des auteurs'—a policy of focusing criticism primarily upon directors and specifically upon chosen directors whose individuality of style qualified them, in the eyes of the *Cahiers* team, as 'auteurs'—creators in the personal sense we accept for the other arts." Thus far, I would criticize only one minor chronological discrepancy. François Truffaut first promulgated the "politique des auteurs," not in 1957, but in the January, 1954, issue of *Cahiers* with an article entitled: "*Une certaine tendance du cinéma français*," "*Du cinéma français*," it might be noted, not *du cinéma américain*. Consequently, Callenbach is guilty of a grave distortion when he makes the patronizing statement: "In its homeland the politique has led to many peculiar judgments, especially of American film-makers: it is Samuel Fuller, Nicholas Ray, and Otto Preminger who figure as the gods of this new pantheon." A pantheon with only three pillars is an idiot's pantheon, indeed. In his quick Cook's tour, or shall we say Roud's romp, through the pages of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, Mr. Callenbach has overlooked such pantheon gods as Robert Bresson, Luis Buñuel, Charles Chaplin, Jean Cocteau, Alexander Dovjenko, Carl Dreyer, Sergei Eisenstein, Robert

Flaherty, D. W. Griffith, Howard Hawks, Alfred Hitchcock, Fritz Lang, Kenji Mizoguchi, F. W. Murnau, Max Ophüls, Jean Renoir, Roberto Rossellini, Josef von Sternberg, Erich Von Stroheim, Jean Vigo, and Orson Welles.

Here are some hard facts for the bemused critics and the possibly misled readers of *Film Quarterly*: In 1958, the *Cahiers* critics listed the twelve greatest films of all time in terms of their pantheon of directors—Murnau's *Sunrise*, Renoir's *Rules of the Game*, Rossellini's *Strangers*, Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible*, Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, Welles' *Arkadin*, Dreyer's *Ordet*, Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu*, Vigo's *L'Atalante*, Von Stroheim's *The Wedding March*, Hitchcock's *Under Capricorn*, Chaplin's *Monsieur Verdoux*. That same year, Truffaut listed the ten greatest living directors as: Chaplin, Renoir, Dreyer, Rossellini, Hitchcock, Sternberg, Buñuel, Bresson, Cance, Lang. It seems strange that Callenbach's pantheon gods—Fuller, Ray, Preminger—fail to appear in these lists. I am certainly not arguing that these three directors have not been favorably reviewed in *Cahiers*. They have, and with good reason. What I find intolerable in *Film Quarterly* is the persistent distortion of opposing critical viewpoints. It is too easy to dismiss a system of critical values involving hundreds of directors by harping on the two or three you happen to find "peculiar." It is also irresponsible for a magazine ostensibly devoted to "film scholarship" to create the impression that every critic and contributor to *Cahiers*, *Movie*, *Film Culture*, and *The New York Film Bulletin* follows the same "line" and shares the same aesthetic theory. I am now writing for *Film Quarterly*. Do I therefore follow the *Film Quarterly* "line"? I should hope not.

Perhaps, taste is a function of scale. To take a specific example, the Spring 1962, *Film Quarterly* was designated "A SPECIAL ISSUE ON HOLLYWOOD." The cover consists of a rear-view still from Kent Mackenzie's *Exiles*, complete with garbage cans. After this unappetizing beginning, the magazine gets rolling with a holier-than-thou editorial: "Turn on! Turn On!"—a

West Coast sequel to Lindsay Anderson's "Stand Up!" Next we are treated to a "discussion" entitled with suitable pomposity: "Personal Creation in Hollywood—Is It Possible?" The panel consists of those renowned authorities on personal creation: Fred Zinnemann, John Houseman, Gavin Lambert, Irvin Kershner, Kent Mackenzie, Pauline Kael, and Colin Young. Arthur Knight pops up with a puff on "The New Hollywood Museum," an institution designed to be less useful than comparable institutions in New York, London, and Paris. Albert Johnson interviews Hubert Cornfield and Paul Wendkos, and manages to provide his readers with some new information, a rare event in *Film Quarterly*. William Pechter's analysis of Abraham Polonsky's career is similarly constructive. Joseph Anderson rounds out the article section with a comparison of Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* and John Sturges' *The Magnificent Seven*, an ambivalent comparison to say the least. Anderson on Kurosawa and imitator John Sturges: "In this instance many significant changes stem from traditional Hollywood ways of seeing things, and comparing *The Magnificent Seven* with Kurosawa's film reveals some of the fixed ideas which inhibit American film-making." Anderson on John Ford and imitator Kurosawa: "Yet Kurosawa's self-acknowledged debt to the American Western, particularly John Ford's, helped to determine the shape of *The Seven Samurai*. This foreign influence has nourished him. Without the American cinema, there would be no Kurosawa." In the pages of *Film Quarterly*, that is about all the American cinema is good for: to nourish Kurosawa and the other gods of the espresso pantheon. Notice that Kurosawa's debt to Ford is "self-acknowledged." If Kurosawa had not given the show away, would Ford's influence be mentioned at all in *Film Quarterly*? I doubt it. The remainder of this pathetic "Hollywood Issue" is devoted to the usual quota of film reviews (three) and "entertainments" reviews (ten). No filmographies. No research articles. Not even the kind of fun pieces which a subject like Hollywood might

be expected to inspire in the dreariest academicians. Nothing, in fact, but faith, hope, and exhortation.

By contrast, the December, 1955, American issue of *Cahiers du Cinéma* contains articles by Max Ophuls (*Hollywood, petite île*), Eric Rohmer (*Redécouvrir l'Amérique*), Jacques Rivette (*Notes sur une révolution*), André Bazin (*Evolution du Western*), Claude Chabrol (*Evolution du film policier*), Jean Domarchi (*Evolution du film musical*), Pierre Kast (*Thousand and Three*), Henri Mercillon (*Où en est l'économie du cinéma américain?*), Aldrian Scott (*History of the Black List*), Harry Purvis (*Memento du dialoguiste hollywoodien*). The issue's *pièce de résistance* is a dictionary of (then) contemporary American directors—sixty in detail, one hundred and fifty in all, with photographs, biographical and filmographical data, and critical judgments of their careers. The sixty are: Robert Aldrich, Laslo Benedek, John Berry, John Brahm, Richard Brooks, Frank Capra, Charles Chaplin, George Cukor, Michael Curtiz, Jules Dassin, Cecil B. DeMille, Edward Dmytryk, Allan Dwan, Richard Fleischer, John Ford, Samuel Fuller, Tay Garnett, Edmund Goulding, Henry Hathaway, Howard Hawks, Stuart Heisler, Alfred Hitchcock, John Huston, Elia Kazan, Gene Kelly, Henry King, Henry Koster, Fritz Lang, Mitchell Leisen, Joseph Losey, Leo McCarey, Joseph L. Mankiewicz, Anthony Mann, Lewis Milestone, Vincente Minnelli, Robert Montgomery, Arch Oboler, Joseph Pevney, Otto Preminger, Richard Quine, Nicholas Ray, Mark Robson, Robert Rossen, Robert Siodmak, Douglas Sirk, Josef von Sternberg, George Stevens, John Sturges, Preston Sturges, Jacques Tourneur, Edgar G. Ulmer, King Vidor, Raoul Walsh, Charles Walters, Orson Welles, William Wellman, Billy Wilder, Robert Wise, William Wyler, and Fred Zinnemann. There are more directors in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in *Film Quarterly's* philosophy. Oh yes, the cover—a front view of Marilyn Monroe, no less, in the skirt-blowing sequence from *The Seven Year Itch*. Looking at these two Hollywood issues

side by side, front to rear, the disinterested observer would have to concede every advantage of taste, scholarship, and perception to *Cahiers du Cinéma*. The difference between *Film Quarterly's* view of Hollywood and *Cahiers's* is the difference between plain subtraction and differential calculus. If the editors and critics of *Film Quarterly* want to cut the cinema down to size, even midget size, that is their privilege, but then there is no reason for a debate. People who think that only ten films a year are worth seeing will hardly be interested in value judgments concerning hundreds.

My defense of the *auteur* theory is therefore a defense in depth. What I have argued in one context after another for the past two years is simply that the *auteur* theory is the most efficient method of classifying the cinema: past, present and future. However, the *auteur* theory was never intended as an occult ritual. As I stated in my "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962" (*Film Culture*, Winter 1962/3): "Unfortunately, some critics have embraced the *auteur* theory as a short-cut to film scholarship. With a 'you-see-it-or-you-don't' attitude toward the reader, the particularly lazy *auteur* critic can save himself the drudgery of communication and explanation. Indeed, at their worst, *auteur* critiques are less meaningful than the straightforward plot reviews which pass for criticism in America. Without the necessary research and analysis, the *auteur* theory can degenerate into the kind of snobbish racket which is associated with the merchandising of paintings."

Research and analysis are indispensable for sound *auteur* criticism. Whether you are committed to Ray, Nicholas, or Ray, Satyajit, you have to see all their work before you can be authoritative on any one of their films. After a given number of films, a pattern is established, and we can speak of the Rays, of Ophuls, Renoir, Mizoguchi, Hitchcock, Chaplin, Ford, Welles, Dreyer, Rossellini, Murnau, Griffith, Sternberg, Eisenstein, Stroheim, Buñuel, Breason, Hawks, Lang, Flaherty, Vigo, as we speak of artists and authors in other media. Because the *auteur* theory itself is a pattern theory in

constant flux, I would never endorse a Ptolemaic constellation of directors in a fixed orbit. Only after thousands of films have been reevaluated, will any personal pantheon have a reasonably objective validity. The task of validating the *auteur* theory is an enormous one, and the end will never be in sight. Meanwhile, the *auteur* habit of collecting random films in directorial bundles will serve posterity with at least a tentative classification.

A debate over the *auteur* theory should be concerned with nuances rather than extremes. There is nothing new or revolutionary about studying the cinema through its directors. Even the socially conscious film histories of the Rotha - Griffith - Lindgren - Jacobs - Kracauer-Sadoul-Aristarco-Knight syndicate manage to recognize the role of the director in certain periods and locales, mainly long ago and far away. Where I part company with these eminent gentlemen is in my conception of film history in terms of the career spans of directors.

I made my position clear in the Spring, 1962, issue of *Film Culture*:

"The chronological division of the cinema into historical periods tends to perpetuate what may be called the pyramid fallacy of many film historians. This fallacy consists of viewing the history of cinema as a process by which approved artisans have deposited their slabs of celluloid on a single pyramid rising ultimately to a single apex, be it Realism, Humanism, Marxism, Journalism, Abstractionism, or even Eroticism. Directors are valued primarily for their 'contributions' to the evolution of a Utopian cinema efficiently adjusted to a Utopian society. Once a formal contribution has been made, subsequent refinements are downgraded. If Murnau disposed of camera movement, why should we honor Ophüls? Since most of the technical vocabulary, the zoom notwithstanding, was established by the end of the silent era, there has been a tendency to honor sound films almost exclusively for social content. The 1958 Brussels poll, which may have been the last gasp of the pyramid critics, cited only three sound films out of the top twelve, and of

these three, *La Grande Illusion* and *The Bicycle Thief* were clearly content selections while *Citizen Kane* probably received mixed support from its formal and political partisans. (It might be noted that the recent *Sight and Sound* poll reflected the rising influence of the new French critics and film-makers.)

"The patent system of the pyramid generally holds that silent directors invented forms while sound directors perfected styles, and in the pyramid histories, particularly those oriented to realism, stylists are the drones of the cinema. It might be charitable to suggest that stylists are harder to analyze than inventors, and that it at least seems easier to define Eisenstein than to define Hitchcock. Actually, critics who are superficial about Hitchcock are usually superficial about Eisenstein as well.

"One problem with the pyramid approach is that the base becomes rigid, and silent classics, especially, become encrusted with reverential moss. It is then almost as difficult to dislodge Pudovkin without disturbing Eisenstein as it is to move Stalin without compromising Lenin. Since new criticism is inevitably revolutionary, new critics may find it useful to smash the pyramid altogether and start with what they know firsthand. Another hazard with the pyramid is that deviations from the apex are rejected even when acknowledged masters are involved. Indeed, what is most striking about pyramid histories is the number of directors who have allegedly declined, compromised, sold out, retreated from reality, evaded responsibility, and otherwise gone astray. Some directors, of course, decline by any standards. It cannot be reasonably argued that René Clair in 1962 is equal to René Clair in 1932. What is tiresome about pyramid critics is their tone of moral outrage. In his *Sequence* attack on Hitchcock's Hollywood films, Lindsay Anderson seemed irritated even by the posh hotel Hitchcock patronized on his London visit. Perhaps the most remarkable pyramid denunciation of all time is Kracauer's criticism of German directors for being too esoteric for the masses.

"What then is the alternative to the pyra-

mid? I would suggest an inverted pyramid opening outward to accommodate the unpredictable range and diversity of individual directors. The time span of the cinema can then be divided into the career spans of its directors, each of whom is granted the option of a personal mystique apart from any collective mystique of the cinema as a whole. The inverted pyramid does not require a new manifesto. Critics and film-makers have been moving in that direction for the past decade. History as biography is reflected in the increasing frequency of director retrospectives and in the popularization of director cults."

There are many problems and paradoxes to be considered with respect to the *auteur* theory. At the very least, the *auteur* theory serves as a convenient figure of speech. "Aimez-vous Brahms?" asks the Saganesque seducer. "I don't like Bach, but I respect him," observes the Helen Hokinson woman in the *New Yorker* record shop. For centuries, the Elizabethan *politique* has decreed the reading of every Shakespearean play before any encounter with the Jonsonian repertory. In Jacques Rivette's *Paris nous appartient*, Jean-Claude Brialy asks Betty Schneider if she would still admire *Percicles* if it were not signed by Shakespeare. Giant computers are now working overtime to determine if *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* were written by the same person. If not, our conception of each work would change. This is the *auteur* tradition of Western Civilization, and its application to the cinema tends to legitimize the cinema's cultural aspirations.

Susanne Langer has challenged this entire tradition in her antipersonal tract on aesthetics, *Feeling and Form*. For Miss Langer, the work of an artist is transformed into an "art symbol," and this art symbol cannot be correlated with the distinctive personality of the artist. Certainly, there is no immutable law in art which decrees that the artist sign his work, or accept responsibility for it. Japanese painters often changed their names every five years or so when they changed their styles. Much of the art of antiquity cannot be traced to individual artists, but it is just the same. What differ-

ence does it make then? To the artist none. To the critic a great deal. The *auteur* theory is ultimately a critical theory, and not a creative theory. The artist does not worry about technical competence, personality, or interior meaning, nor about imitating nature or the objective correlative, nor about form and content. These are all critical terms which enable critics to interpret the works of artists for the benefit of the (critics') readers. The point of view of the critic is always different from the point of view of the creator. In the cinema, the critic sits before the screen, and seeks to communicate the glories of *mise-en-scène* which appear before him. The director has no concern with *mise-en-scène*, as such, because his point of view takes him behind the screen to the various technical stages of preparation. The director must combine the elements of the illusion into the illusion itself, and the critic must then analyze the illusion for its constituent elements, but this reciprocal process is never completely realized. A residue of manner and meaning defies analysis. A barrier between creator and critic will always remain as one of the mysteries of art, and criticism can only attempt an approximation of accuracy to inaccuracy. There are exceptions to the *auteur* theory, of course. The late André Bazin, Richard Roud, Ian Cameron, Manny Farber, and other critics have probed some of the weaknesses in the theory. I would say at this point only that the *auteur* theory comes closer than any other to providing sufficient information on the meaning and style of the cinema.

Rather than continue an abstract argument I would like to reprint here an article—"Italy's Big Four"—which I wrote in the summer of 1961 for *Showbill* as a practical application of the *auteur* theory. Although the piece suffers from compression and facility, it should suggest the potential range of the *auteur* theory:

Of the one hundred and eighteen directors now involved in the industrial renaissance of Italian film-making, only four—Luchino Visconti, Roberto Rossellini, Michelangelo Antonioni, and Federico Fellini—seem destined for more than the immortality of a footnote. Vis-

conti and Rossellini have been directing feature films for twenty years, Antonioni and Fellini for ten, and the significant history of the Italian cinema can be encompassed within these career spans even though Italian filmmakers were producing ambitious spectacles before Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* in 1915.

Because of freakish distribution problems, Visconti's *Ossessione* (1942) and Rossellini's *Open City* (1946) have been separately honored as the midwives of neorealism, an over-defined movement which in its time and place simply marked the rejection of the sanctimonious conventions of Fascism. The Italian cinema before *Ossessione* is a mountain of spaghetti, some of it reasonably tasteful, but most of it too starchy for anything but home consumption. Mussolini came to power more than a decade before Hitler, and the crucially formative years of the twenties found Murnau, Lang, Pabst and Lesser German directors evolving their techniques under the relatively protective aegis of the Weimar Republic while their Italian colleagues were marking time under Il Duce's balcony.

Visconti at 64, Rossellini at 54, Antonioni at 48, and Fellini at 41 seem reasonably safe from the creeping standardization which has afflicted so many of their once promising colleagues. One might except the late Curzio Malaparte, whose one film, *The Strange Deception*, lent the Italian cinema intellectual prestige at a crucial point in its postwar development, and on another level of deception, a special note must be devoted to the inflated reputation of Vittorio De Sica in the early 'fifties.

If Visconti and Rossellini invented neorealism in *Ossessione* and *Open City*, and then invested it with the ultimate profundity of *La Terra Trema* and *Paisan*, De Sica milked it dry with *Shoe-Shine* and *The Bicycle Thief*. Lacking an insight into the real world, De Sica relied instead on tricks of pathos which he had learned too well as an actor. It is unlikely that any of the Big Four would have made the *Bicycle Thief* in the De Sica-Zavattini manner. Visconti would have catapulted his victim into the Roman underworld where social corruption

and a sense of personal destiny would transform the wronged laborer into a professional bicycle thief. Rossellini's character, heroically transformed by God during the search, would return home with the awareness that his integrity as a human being was more important than any material object. Antonioni's hero, realizing the futility of his isolated existence in an impersonal society, would ride the recovered bicycle off an embankment in a quasisuicidal gesture. After some bizarre experiences, Fellini's protagonist would find his bicycle only to have it stolen again the next day, but the hapless victim would come up smiling at the hope radiated by a little girl playing a harmonica.

All four directors have diverged from the literal path of neorealism which was never anything more than the Stalinallee of social realism. In Visconti's work there has always been an unreconciled tension between a Marxian vision of society and an operatic conception of character. *Rocco and His Brothers* is comparable in its contradictions to what might have come out of a Verdi-Brecht adaptation of *The Brothers Karamazov*. The unity of the family in *Rocco* is destroyed partly because of the urban pressures of Milan on the rural mystique of the South, partly because of the inhumanly Christ-like sanctity of Rocco, partly because of the destructive intervention of a wilful prostitute, and partly because of the fratricidal destiny of the brothers. The disturbing homosexual overtones of *Rocco* (and *Ossessione*) reflect additional conflicts with which the director must cope.

Throughout his career Visconti has been haunted by the image of the destructive woman. In the sublime cinema of Mizoguchi and Ophüls, most notably in *Ugetsu* and *Lola Montès*, woman is presented as the Redeemer of men, but for Visconti, she is man's nemesis. The females in *Ossessione*, *Senso*, *White Nights*, *Bellissima*, and *Rocco* wreak their havoc not through spidery machinations but through a psychic force which the male can neither resist nor overcome. It follows almost logically that Visconti is the best director of actresses in the world, and the performances of Clara Calamai

(*Osessione*), Anna Magnani (*Bellissima*), Alida Valli (*Senso*), Maria Schell (*White Nights*), and Annie Girardot (*Rocco*) are among the most memorable creations of the cinema.

Roberto Rossellini had directed three obscure wartime films—*La Nave Bianca*, *Un Pilote Ritorna*, *L'Uomo Della Croce*—before he emerged on the world scene with his neorealistic classics, *Open City*, *Paisan*, and *Germany Year Zero*. Then he went into a Magnani-Cocteau period with *The Miracle*, *The Human Voice*, and *The Infernal Machine* before the advent of Ingrid Bergman in *Stromboli*, *Europa 51* (*No Greater Love*), *Strangers*, *Joan at the Stake*, and *Fear*. During his Bergman period, he also directed *Flowers of St. Francis*, *Dov'è La Libertà*, an episode in *The Seven Deadly Sins* (*Envy*), and *We Are the Women* (with Bergman). Except for the brilliant, scandal-provoking documentary, *India*, Rossellini was off the screen for five years before making his comeback with *General Della Rovere*, a patriotic success followed by *Era Notte a Roma*, Stendhal's *Vanina Vanini*, and *Viva Italia!*

The most Catholic of all directors, Rossellini has always been obsessed by the inner miracles of human personality. In his oddly stylized treatment of the Honneger-Claudé *Joan at the Stake*, Rossellini sends Ingrid Bergman awkwardly soaring into Heaven, a fitting climax to his cinematic conversion of the actress into a saint. Rossellini has confronted death as a metaphysical experience with none of the histrionics of Visconti, the despair of Antonioni, the emotional causality of Fellini. The final death-images of Magnani in *Open City*, the partisans in *Paisan*, the prostitute in *Europa 51*, and De Sica in *General Della Rovere* possess a formal dignity unique in world cinema. However, like most mystics, Rossellini sacrifices fact for truth, and the ambiguities of the human condition often elude him. With Chaplin and Buñuel, he stands apart from the other artists of his time, irritating, inimitable and indispensable.

Next to Resnais, Antonioni is the most abstract film-maker in the world today. The direc-

tor envisages the world as a chessboard on which the kings and queens, the knights and bishops of old have been replaced by pawns whose moves are hopelessly confused by the application of obsolete rules. His first film, *Cronaca di un Amore*, focuses on two lovers who are parted by the accidental deaths of a friend and a husband, deaths willed but not executed by the couple. Ever since, Antonioni has been preoccupied with the shadow of guilt which hovers over human relationships before the police arrive. No director in history has been as fascinated by the moral permutations of suicides and fatal accidents. Hitchcock and Buñuel have derived dark humor from this casuistic problem which apparently torments Antonioni.

However, Antonioni's films before *L'Avventura*—*Cronaca di un Amore*, *La Signora Senza Camelie*, *Le Amiche*, *I Vinti*, *Il Grido*—were concerned also with problems arising from class distinctions and economic calculations. (The key to the director's treatment of the relationship between men and women is stated by a character in *Le Amiche*: "Every woman who lives with a man to whom she is superior is unhappy.") *L'Avventura* and *La Notte* derive their maddening rhythm from the idea that the duration of time drains away human emotions, and their distinctive visual shape from the suggestion that spatial forms create psychological barriers. The unique aesthetic developed by Antonioni has led him to abandon the lower and middle classes where lives are constricted by necessity, and to concentrate on the idle rich who have the time to torture each other.

Fellini is the only one of the Four with a flair for comedy, amply projected in his first two films, *Luci del Varietà* (co-directed with Lattuada) and *The White Sheik*. In a more somber vein, *I Vitelloni*, *La Strada*, *Il Bidone*, and *Cabiria* are all bathed in a tragicomic lyricism which is intensely personal and reflects Fellini's compassion for the rejects of the modern world. After this impressive tetralogy, Fellini undertook in *La Dolce Vita* to provide

a Dantean vision of the modern world as viewed from the top instead of the bottom. Unfortunately, there is more to a great film than a great conception, and Fellini has enlarged his material without expanding his ideas. Consequently, the film is as bloated as the fish which terminates the orgy sequence.

However, it can be argued that in terms of social impact, *La Dolce Vita* is the most important film ever made. This does not imply a correlation with artistic merit since by the standard of impact, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is superior to *Moby Dick*. The fantastic popularity of *La Dolce Vita* can be summed up in the beggar's comment in Buñuel's *Viridiana*: "One must sin before one can repent." Without being consciously hypocritical, Fellini has dramatized the fundamental injustices of social morality. The poor creatures abandoned by Antonioni to their lives of necessity flock to *La Dolce Vita* to share Fellini's disgust with the sweet life, but the spectacle of corruption fills them with envy for the options of the hero. Confident of their ultimate righteousness, many spectators would like to slide along the infernal surfaces of fur and chrome before regaining

their moral footing. If *La Dolce Vita* contributes to an awareness of the hypocrisy of so-called social morality which denies to the peasants and the proles the sweet Faustian decisions of the Kennedys and the Rockefellers, the film can be forgiven for its intellectual and formal failures.

Although their aspiration often exceeds their sensibility, the Big Four act as the conscience of the Italian film industry. As a national bloc, their most serious challengers active today are the French Big Five of Renoir, Bresson, Resnais, Truffaut, and Godard. It would be difficult to find more than ten active directors from the rest of the world on the same artistic plane. At this moment, the Big Four are critically fashionable, but just a few years ago their films were being hissed and booed on three continents, and a few years from now, they will probably be downgraded again. This absurd oscillation of critical judgments is caused largely by the haphazard system of distribution and revival in practice today. If there is such a thing as ultimate judgment, only time will tell if the Big Four are the wave of the future or the last-gasp of the past.

Films of the Quarter

Pauline Kael

Lawrence of Arabia is the most literate and intelligent and tasteful and the most beautiful of the modern expensive spectacle films that I have seen, and I wish it had never been made. There is a story that Greta Garbo, at a screening of Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast*, watched the transformation of the Beast into Prince Charming, and cried out "Give me back my Beast." I want my T. E. Lawrence back.

The treatment is on an exquisitely high level, but the method and perhaps the intentions of those who made the film are not so different from the exploitation of historical and legend-

ary heroes in cruder epics. The trap they set for the audience, baiting it with a figure already famous, is, unfortunately, a trap we can't get out of. We can't cut the film off from the interests and associations that have made us go to see it. It is not the story of Joe Doakes that has lured us into the theater, it is the story of T. E. Lawrence. That's what the producers were counting on. But perhaps they didn't plan on some of the consequences. Inevitably, in a film of this kind, a film that attempts to justify its scale by biographical and historical pretensions, we use standards of historical truth, as well as standards of dramatic content, coherence, structure. *Lawrence of Arabia* not